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A SITUATIONAL TESTING APPROACH TO ASSESSING TEACHER TRAINEES.

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TO ASSESS THE SENSITIVITY AND FLEXIBILITY OF TEACHER TRAINEES IN SITUATIONS WHERE THE LEARNER'S FRAME OF REFERENCE DIFFERS FROM THE TRAINEE'S, A METHOD ENTITLED COMMUNICATION TASK WAS EMPLOYED. THE TRAINEE WAS TOLD TO COMMUNICATE (IN 15 MINUTES) THE CONCEPT OF THE BALANCE OF POWER IN THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT TO A "ROLE PLAYER," WHOSE BACKGROUND WAS SKETCHED, AND WHO, BY ASKING FIVE PREDETERMINED QUESTIONS, GAVE IMPLICIT INFORMATION ABOUT HIS FRAME OF REFERENCE. RATINGS OF TRAINEES, ON A NINE-POINT SCALE BY AT LEAST ONE OBSERVER, ON AWARENESS AND ADAPTATION TO THIS INFORMATION CORRELATED SIGNIFICANTLY WITH FINAL RATINGS OF 241 PEACE CORPS TEACHER TRAINEES AND WITH RESPONSES TO TWO OPEN-ENDED STATEMENTS SCORED TO PROVIDE AN INDEX OF ATTITUDE TOWARD TEACHING. SENSITIVITY DID NOT PROVE TO BE A SUFFICIENT CRITERION FOR CLASSROOM PERFORMANCE, BECAUSE OF THE ADDITIONAL NEED TO CONTROL CLASSROOM BEHAVIOR. THEREFORE THE TRAINEE'S "STRENGTH" WAS ASSESSED FROM A CONTROL TASK IN WHICH THREE SIXTH-GRADE ROLE PLAYERS IN A CULTURALLY DISADVANTAGED SCHOOL PRESENTED DISCIPLINE PROBLEMS. POSSIBLE USES OF THE COMMUNICATION TASK IN THE AREA OF TEACHER TRAINING WERE LISTED. THIS PAPER WAS PRESENTED AT THE AMERICAN EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH ASSOCIATION MEETING (NEW YORK, FEBRUARY 18, 1967). (LC)

A Situational Testing Approach to Assessing Teacher Trainees[1]

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Teachers are similar to other training agents such as social workers, psychotherapists, Peace Corps volunteers, and parents in that they provide an interpersonal environment for the person or group with whom they interact in order to produce some desired goal. The effectiveness of teachers as well as other training agents, therefore, can be indexed by how well they can create certain environments. Viewed in terms of a training model which I have found useful, trainee effectiveness is defined as "The capacity to radiate a wide variety of enviornments, to select from this variety a specific environment to be radiated toward a particular person or group with the aim of producing a particular behavioral outcome, and to shift from one environment to another under appropriate circumstances." (Hunt, 1966, pp. 138-139). Kurt Lewin's well-known formula--Behavior is a function of the Person and the Environment--can be restated in terms of a training agent to read: an Environment directed toward a Person produces a Behavior. In order to assess teacher trainees, therefore, it becomes important to evaluate the trainee's capability of radiating one or a number of environments and to shift flexibly from one to another under appropriate conditions. The present method was designed to assess directly the environments which a trainee has available when the desired behavioral outcome is specified and the stimulus conditions from the learner are controlled.

1. Presented at American Educational Research Association meeting in New York City, February 18, 1967.

The Communication Task (Hunt, 1965a) is a behavioral method for assessing effectiveness in interpersonal communicaiton. Rationale in developing the task was to provide a trainee with a desired behavioral objective and to control the learner behavior which he encountered so that the teaching environment used by the trainee could be observed and rated.

The Communication Task has been used in several assessment programs, usually in combination with other behavioral tasks and paper-and-pencil measures. The present report will summarize the task and briefly indicate its relation to some of these other measures.

The Communication Task requires the trainee to spend about an hour-and-a-half, only fifteen minutes of which is spent in the actual presentation. First, he is told that his task will be to communicate the concept of the balance of power in the Federal Government to another person. During this first phase, the trainee is given informaton about the topic so that he can acquaint himself with exactly how the federal system of checks and balances works. Having received information about the behavioral objective and spending an hour acquainting himself with the topic, he is next told that he will be communicating to a 30-year-old Venezuelan immigrant named George Lopez who works in New York City as a waiter and who hopes to pass his citizenship exam. Goerge needs information about the balance of power in order to pass the citizenship examination, and he has had two or three earlier sessions on the State Government. Instructions to the trainee emphasize that his job is to present the material so that Goerge Lopez can understand the idea of checks and balances and how it works. The trainee is also given implicit information about the learner's frame of reference during the task.

In the presentation itself, the trainee entered a room where a staff member introduced himself as Goerge Lopez, a Venezuelan, and told the trainee that he would have 15 minutes to present the material in any way he wished. During the 15 minutes, the role player attempted to present a controlled stimulus condition to the trainee. His general manner was one of acquiescent interest, but his mode of thinking was very concrete. After the first 2 or 3 minutes of the presentation, the role player raised the first of a series of five obstacles, and continued to introduce an obstacle every 2 or 3 minutes. He attempted to raise these questions appropriate to the context of the presentation so that the sequence of the obstacles varied but he introduced all five to each trainee. The first obstacle was a misperception of the system as unilateral, i.e. "The President's in charge. He can tell everyone what to do." The other four obstacles were "The judges are like priests; they can tell everyone what's good or bad"; "But why did the lawmakers pass a bad bill?"; "This sounds like it takes an awful lot of time. Wouldn't it be simpler to have a revolution?"; "These two can gang up on the other one and keep him in line." In addition to these specific obstacles, Goerge Lopez provided potential cues about his language by always referring to the three branches as the "judges," "the lawmakers," and "the President" rather than judicial, legislative, and executive branches. In general, he used a predetermined set of terms to describe the materials being dealt with, e.g., veto became "throw it out," etc.

The Communication Task was not developed by chance. The stimulus conditions were developed in order to produce trainee behavior relevant to how much the trainee would be aware of the learner's frame of reference, and how well he would modulate to this frame of reference in his presentation. Trainees varied enormously in terms of the degree to which they take George Lopez's frame of reference into account. One one extreme is the approach in which the trainee simply gives a prepared lecture without any modulation to the learner's frame of reference. In this rigid approach, no account is taken of the information provided in the obstacles nor is any adaptation made to George's language level. At the other extreme is the appraoch in which the trainee finds out George's frame of reference in some detail and the terms with which he can comfortably refer to the material. Then the concept is presented by some analogy or model which is comprehensible to Goerge, e.g., "balance three plates on a tray." Therefore, the primary variation observed and rated was the degree to which the trainee <u>adapted</u> to the learner's frame of reference, which we will refer to as <u>adaptability</u>.

Trainee behavior was rated on several dimensions by at least one observer. Trainee reaction to each of the five obstacles was rated on a 9-point adaptation scale ranging from '1' which was completely insensitive to '9' which involved the trainee's frame of reference and modulating to it in a flexible fashion. Inter-rater reliability was found to be a function of the experience of the raters, and for experienced raters ranged from .85 to .92.

Although the Communication Task provides other information, only the results from the adaptability rating will be described. Bearing in mind that adaptability as measured by the Communicaiton Task is only one predictive component, we may nonetheless consider its predictive validity. The Communication Task was used in two pre-training assessment programs of Peace Corps trainees (Hunt, Joyce, and Weinstein, 1965; Hunt, 1965b) which permitted investigation of the relation between adaptability and the criterion of success in Peace Corps training as indicated by the final board rating. For 178 trainees, most of whom were to become teachers, correlation was .21 ($<$ .01) and for a sample of 53 Peace Corps trainees who were to be trained to be teachers in Tanzania, the correlation was .33 ($<$ .01) between adaptability and final board rating. For this latter sample, adaptability was correlated significantly with sociometric status. The Communication Task was also used in an assessment program of 52 candidates for an Urban Teacher Preparation program (Weinstein, Hunt, and Joyce, 1965), and to assess the pre-program characteristics of a sample of 28 National Teacher Corps trainees (Hunt, 1967). The relation between adaptability and either scores on the General Aptitude Test or Miller Analogies Test was investigated in all four samples. Although all correlations were positive, the relationship was significant in only one sample. An experimental measure designed to index trainee's attitude to teaching through use of a free response procedure was available in all four samples. In this measure the trainee responded to two stems "The most important thing in teaching is" and "The best way for children to learn is" which were scored according to how much the trainee felt that the teacher-learner process should take account of the learner's frame of reference. Scores on this test were significantly related to adaptability rating in three of the four samples ($< .01$).

Because of the nature of the Communicaiton Task, it is tempting to consider this behavior sample as a miniature teaching situation and to draw conclusions about a trainee's potential teaching effectiveness in general from the trainee's behavior in the task. However, we feel that it is important to realize the task specificity and to view this method as a procedure specifically designed to measure one skill component--adaptability or sensitivity--which may be important for certain jobs. The degree to which sensitivity will be predictive obviously depends upon the degree to which the criterion requires the component of sensitivity. Put another way, we are attempting to avoid problems inherent in defining "the ideal teacher" in general by analyzing those components required on the job.

To exemplify this point, experience in the application of the Communication Task to the assessment of candidates for an Urban Teacher Preparation program is relevant. When the actual performance of teaching culturally disadvantaged students was considered, it was noted that trainees high in sensitivity did not always perform most effectively in the classroom; indeed one or two experienced great difficulty. Upon closer inspection it appeared that one possible reason for this lack of correlation might be the operation of another component, the capacity of the trainee to regulate and control classroom behavior. Therefore, another task similar in form and rationale was designed

(Weinstein, Hunt and Joyce, 1965) to assess a trainee's capacity to regulate and control classroom behavior. This Control Task consisted of three role players who were 6th grade students in a culturally disadvantaged school. They presented disciplinary obstacles by talking without permission, leaving their seats, acting bored, etc. Ratings on this control task were primarily to index the trainee's strength. Using these two tasks in combination therefore provided a very general pattern of a trainee's capacity on both the sensitivity and strength components.

In conclusion, we note that behavioral methods such as the Communication Task for measuring a particular skill component have a variety of possible uses in the area of teacher training. First, as indicated, the measures can be used for selection, preferably in combination with other components. Secondly, this information can be used for differential training purposes by providing different kinds of training experience for trainees who are low in sensitivity than for trainees who are high in sensitivity. Third, the method itself may be used as a form of training by video-taping the trainee's performance and feeding it back to him as a source of potential information for becoming more sensitive. Finally, the method may be used to evaluate change brought about by a specific intervention through using the task at various points in the training program. Some of these more specific uses of this behavioral method will be described in the next paper by Dr. Joyce.

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